

Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Slack, Richard and Shrives, Philip (2008) Social disclosure and legitimacy in Premier League football clubs: the first ten years. *Journal of Applied Accounting Research*, 9 (1). pp. 17-28. ISSN 0967-5426

Published by: Emerald

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09675420810886105>
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09675420810886105>>

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link:
<http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/864/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>

This document may differ from the final, published version of the research and has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies. To read and/or cite from the published version of the research, please visit the publisher's website (a subscription may be required.)



**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE



UniversityLibrary

Social disclosure and legitimacy in Premier League football clubs: the first ten years

Richard Slack and Philip Shrives

Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Abstract

Purpose – This longitudinal study aims to examine the extent to which football clubs in the Premier League communicate community activities in their annual reports through social disclosure. The research also seeks to examine the relevance and use of the annual report as a disclosure medium by football clubs. The need for social disclosure is examined in conjunction with media coverage of issues affecting Premier League clubs.

Design/methodology/approach – This study is deductive using three main hypotheses to test relevant underpinning theory used within the research. The study uses content analysis of annual report social disclosures of ten Premier League football clubs from 1993 to 2002, covering the first ten years of the Premier League. A questionnaire was used to evaluate the use of annual reports by those clubs. In addition, media reporting data from *The Sunday Times* is examined.

Findings – This study finds that there has been an increase in adverse media reporting concerning football, football clubs and their activities. One way in which clubs have responded to this increased attention and criticism is by expanding their community activities and associated social reporting, although reporting varies between clubs. The study finds that football clubs do value the annual report as an effective means of communication.

Research limitations/implications – The authors acknowledge that some limitations inevitably affect the generalisability of this research. The use of content analysis, the precise methods adopted and the reliance on *The Sunday Times* constitute limitations. Nevertheless, the research has shown that clubs do engage with their local communities and have increased their reporting of such activities. The research has implications for those football clubs who fail to report their social activities. Further research could explore, why some clubs disclose more than others.

Originality/value – Football is a visible and important part of the UK economy. The study of social reporting by football clubs is in its infancy and this paper tests and applies relevant accounting theory to that sector. It shows that football clubs have begun to take social disclosure seriously within their annual reports.

Keywords Corporate social responsibility, Football, Annual reports, Communities

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This paper adds to the literature on voluntary disclosure reporting. Specifically, this paper examines community reporting by English Premier League football clubs between 1992 and 2002. Football clubs community activities represent an important

The authors thank participants of the Financial Reporting and Business Communication Conference at Cardiff University, Professor Mike Page (Portsmouth University) and Dr David Campbell (Newcastle University) for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper and to the editor and reviewers of *The Journal of Applied Accounting Research* for the support given to this paper. Further, the authors particularly thank Gary Potts and Gary Owen from Northumbria University.

part of value added to society through their involvement with football in the community schemes, educational provision and other external roles that they perform such as hospital visits. Conversely, football clubs place their footprint on society in terms of use of resources, stadia development, car parking and match day congestion, football hooliganism, player behaviour and issues relating to players' wages. Football clubs could face adverse publicity arising from these issues, and from their increased public profile, such as television coverage, might be expected to take actions to counter any such criticism. Increased community reporting is a means of emphasising football's positive societal contribution. Historically, football has had an important place in the community and it might be expected that their community role and involvement would be reported to society. These issues are explored in more detail in the section below on theoretical development.

Motivation for football sector study

Research into football clubs is justified for three reasons. First, football is a visible and important part of economy thus it is important to examine this sector. English clubs generated income of almost £1.7bn (of this premier league clubs generated £1.25bn) in 2002/2003 contributing around £550mn taxation revenues. Since, the advent of the Premier League in 1992 clubs have invested in excess of £1bn of capital investment in stadia (Deloitte and Touche, 2000-2005, Annual Reviews of Football Finance).

Second, and of particular relevance to this study, football has its origins in the community. Thus, it makes sense to examine community reporting within the football sector. Football should be accountable to the community which it derived from in the first instance. In general, professional football clubs were formed around the turn of the twentieth century and had a close association with their local communities, either through the church, local schools or local employers. For instance, Arsenal (1886) was formed by workers at The Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, Aston Villa (1874) from members of the Villa Cross Wesleyan Chapel, Everton (1878) from St Domingo Church Sunday School and Southampton (1885) from the young men's association of St Mary's Church. This community history is explicitly recognised by Aston Villa in their 2002 annual report (p. 10). "Aston Villa is a global name deeply rooted in our community, and we continue to nurture relationships with local people that stretch back generations." Such community origins are more generally noted by the Football Task Force (1999, p. 8) report, which stated that "football clubs in England have deep roots in their communities". This view of community relationship is supported by authors such as Morrow (1999, p. 176) who asserted that "it has long been held that football clubs are an important element within local communities", and Morrow (2000, p. 65) "clubs have a deep rooted identification with a particular city or region and hence community".

Finally, in recent years, the legitimacy of football is being increasingly questioned. There have been issues about the business side of football, the payments made to footballers (signing on fees and wages), the behaviour of players and allegations concerning the racism and hooliganism of fans. A number of writers have raised these issues, for instance: "the English game displays all the symptoms of inequality, short-termism and greed" (Lee, 2001, p. 32). Concerns about football spending were also raised in the Deloitte and Touche (2000, p. 4), Annual Review of Football Finance that stated:

[...] this really is a golden opportunity to put things back on an even keel. We dearly hope to see investment in (among other things) community and fanbase programmes. We worry that

a lot of it [money] will fairly quickly trickle through the club's fingers to the players and their agents.

If football is to maintain its contract with its communities then it needs to demonstrate an open and accountable relationship.

The rest of this paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, the authors discuss the theoretical perspective adopted. Three hypotheses are then developed in relation to community disclosure which includes discussion of the research design used to test the hypotheses and the methods selected. Results are then discussed followed by conclusions and suggestions for further work.

Theoretical development

There is increased pressure on all businesses to improve their social accountability as evidenced by the establishment of stock market indices such as FTSE4 good in the UK. Companies and organisations are searching out ways by which they can assert their legitimacy as they become faced with an increasingly critical and questioning environment.

Legitimacy theory is typically utilised in the literature, to help, explain social and environmental disclosures (Patten, 1991; Deegan and Gordon, 1996; Deegan, 2002; Milne and Patten, 2002; Campbell *et al.*, 2003) and it is equally suitable to explain social disclosures. It assumes that a social contract exists between society and the organisation and that in some way organisations, which damage that contract, need to repair or reconstruct it in some way so as to obtain societal approval (see in particular Shocker and Sethi, 1974).

The question as to what is meant by legitimacy theory and legitimation is explored in detail by Suchman (1995). Clubs may wish to provide a fuller picture of performance rather than just a financial one. This may be because their performance is poor or because they wish to divert attention away from other financial issues such as players' wages, entrance fees or environmental footprint concerns (such as stadia development), all of which raise questions about legitimacy. Lindblom (1994) asserted that legitimacy concerns provided a motivation for increased social disclosure by organisations that are potentially affected by those concerns.

The paper examines whether the Premier League faces problems of legitimacy. Football clubs have arguably queered their pitch with society because of a number of recent activities associated with the game and the players. These misdemeanours include issues to do with footballers' wages, rising entrance prices, restricted entrance policies (season ticket only), football hooliganism and violence (on and off the pitch), racism and the whole perception of "new commercialism" (Hamil *et al.*, 2000, p. 20ff) taking football away from its societal roots.

Lindblom (1994) described four possible legitimation strategies. These briefly comprise:

- (1) an attempt to emphasise future plans of the organisation to rectify past ills;
- (2) an effort to change how society perceives past ills;
- (3) an emphasis on other good acts which are not necessarily related to past ills; and
- (4) to try to change society's expectations about how organisations should behave.

The strategy which is most relevant to this paper is number three. In strategy three, football clubs would disclose community information in order to change society's

perceptions about football. The “relevant publics” are informed about whole areas of the club’s activities via increased disclosure. This distracts readers away from the negative issues described above (such as hooliganism, racism, footballers’ wages and behaviour) and any adverse media reporting by focusing on more positive issues. Thus, constituents are taken away from the bad actions and related publicity to the good (e.g. working with the disadvantaged in the community). Thus, the authors expect, a priori, football clubs to disclose information which informs society about their societal activities and distracts attention from other activities or performance that are less admirable.

The source of these threats to legitimacy are often media related (O’Donovan, 1999; Brown and Deegan, 1998; Deegan *et al.*, 2000) and it is from such an assertion that this paper is developed. “Evidence indicates that management reacts to adverse media coverage and use corporate disclosures as a strategy to alleviate the potential adverse effects caused by negative media coverage” (Deegan *et al.*, 2000, p. 105).

Other studies have examined social disclosure in relation to either individual companies or sectors (see for instance Patten, 1992; Ahmed and Courtis, 1999; Deegan *et al.*, 2000, 2002). Deegan *et al.* (2000, p. 101) found that “organisations utilise their annual report as a means of influencing society’s perception of their operations” and further Deegan *et al.* (2002, p. 312) comment “... that management release positive social and environmental information in response to unfavourable media attention”. In addition to legitimacy theory, media agenda setting theory is relevant to this paper. This theory suggests an association between media attention to certain issues and how important these issues are perceived to be by the public at large, see Deegan and Unerman (2006) for further discussion, in particular pages 283 and 302, note 11. According to Deegan and Unerman, “increased media attention is believed to lead to increased community concern for a particular issue” (p. 283). In addition, Brown and Deegan (1998) found that higher media coverage was associated with increased disclosure of environmental issues. From this, there is an overlap of media agenda setting and legitimacy theories in that the media may highlight a particular issue which leads to increased public awareness that a company then responds to by increased disclosure so as to maintain its legitimacy. Both Brown and Deegan (1998) and Deegan *et al.* (2000) examined adverse media coverage of issues that affected a sector in general and the individual company responses through increased disclosure that were subsequently made. Brown and Deegan (1998) examined general media coverage of environmental issues and the subsequent environmental disclosures made by companies in those industries most affected. This research was conducted using data from five years over a 13-year time period. Deegan *et al.* (2000) examined specific environmental disasters (such as Exxon Valdez and the Moura mine explosion) and the reactions by companies, through increased social and environmental disclosures, across the relevant whole sector.

This paper adopts a similar approach and examines whether there has been an increase in adverse media attention concerning Premier League football clubs and the associated increase in community disclosure as a response. The media attention to issues such a players wages, fees to agents and merchandising affects the sector as a whole and is not necessarily confined to one or two individual clubs. Through this research, this study extends previous work to a sector which is relatively unresearched in the accounting literature despite its public visibility.

Hypotheses

Based upon the public visibility of football and its high level of press coverage, the first hypothesis tests whether football has a legitimacy problem arising from adverse media coverage:

- H1.* Levels of adverse coverage of football in newspapers increased over the first ten years of the Premier League.

If this hypothesis is held then according to media agenda setting theory this would indicate increased societal concerns about football. This in turn would imply a greater need for clubs to repair their legitimacy and would suggest that clubs would increase their community disclosures over the period of study.

Many accounting studies, typically, make use of the annual report but there are a number of other reporting vehicles available. These include a separate community report, the match day programme, the club's web site and so on. Web sites are an important communication media, but for football clubs during this period there were issues with full access via subscription and availability over the full period. The annual report is a permanent document which is easily located and referred to (particularly, at some time in the future when other documents are not so easy to trace) and it is "the most widely used and accessible public document issued by companies" (Cross and Djajadikerta, 2004, p. 12). Morrow (2005, p. vi) also claims (writing about the business of football):

[...] the annual report is an important document; a mass communication device capable of providing information to a wide range of groups and of discharging accountability. In particular, narrative reporting in annual reports provides a convenient route for clubs to convey information to interested stakeholders who may not always have the expertise in interpreting financial statements.

In order to further substantiate this claim *H2* was developed as follows:

- H2.* Football clubs regard the annual report as a key reporting document to stakeholders.

H3 is derived from *H1* and *H2*. If there are increased concerns about clubs' legitimacy (*H1*) and football clubs utilise the annual report (*H2*) to address, these concerns then the authors would expect levels of community disclosure in annual reports to increase over time:

- H3.* Levels of community disclosure in football clubs' annual reports have increased over the first ten years of the Premier League.

Research design

A ten-year research period was identified between 1993 and 2002. The start year, 1993, marked the formation of the English Premier League (season 1992-1993) and a ten-year period was chosen to provide sufficient longitudinal depth to the research. This also allowed the selection of all contiguous Premier League clubs over that ten-year period. Owing to relegation (and a shifting Premier League composition) the number of clubs would decline, if the period were further extended. For this reason, the time period was as selected.

In relation to both *H1* and *H3*, a content analysis approach was selected. For *H1*, the first issue to be addressed was to determine the appropriate location and

measurement of media reporting. A study undertaken by Ivankovic (2004) concluded that, *The Times* was the most suitable paper in the UK for the purpose of content analysis due to its wide distribution and influence. As most football matches occurred on a Saturday afternoon, it was felt most appropriate to use *The Sunday Times*. Although, the authors recognise the limitation of this, *The Sunday Times* is the highest selling broadsheet with a circulation of 1.3mn (July 2005). Owing to the selection of a Sunday newspaper, all weeks across all ten years of the study could be inspected. This was done using library, microfiche and hard copy holdings. Relevant sentences were identified using a content analysis approach (Milne and Adler, 1999). The use of sentences rather than words is appropriate for this study because words have no meaning on their own and by counting sentences the relevance of the search term is easily verified. Appropriate disambiguation and coding rules were developed and an initial three-month pilot study was performed.

In relation to *H3*, the study examined the annual reports of the ten contiguous Premier League clubs from 1993 to 2002. One of the problems inherent with the research in the football sector is the changing composition of leagues because of promotion and relegation. Owing to the financial consequences of this, changes in attendance, playing squads, sponsorship deals, television and media coverage, only those clubs that had been contiguous members from 1993 to 2002 were selected as part of the study. This resulted in ten clubs being used: Arsenal, Aston Villa, Chelsea, Everton, Leeds United, Liverpool, Manchester United, Newcastle United, Southampton and Tottenham Hotspur. The annual reports were obtained directly from all of the clubs to cover the annual reports for every second year, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000 and 2002. This gave a longitudinal dataset that could be matched against *The Sunday Times* media data.

In order to analyse their community reporting, a content analysis of the financial statements was carried out. Once again, sentences were used as the unit of measure. Where sentences dealt with two issues half sentence per issue was counted.

Discussion of content analysis technique

Content analysis is a way of categorising various items of text for the purpose of analysis. The approach taken should be replicable by other researchers. Milne and Adler (1999) discussed this in relation to social and environmental accounting. For a general discussion on content analysis, see Boyatzis (1998) and Krippendorff (2004). According to Milne and Adler (1999), Krippendorff identified three types of reliability. First, stability refers to a coder being able to code the data consistently over time. This can be a problem where a coder becomes more expert in their coding and thus codes something inconsistently over time. Although, Milne and Adler (1999) report it as being the weakest (of the three measures) it is not unimportant in attaining reliability of coding. Stability can be improved by producing rules (called disambiguation rules) that the coder can refer to throughout the coding process and facilitates consistency.

Consistent with the approach taken with the media reporting, a pilot study of 2002 annual reports was undertaken by the authors. Inter coder reliability was 91 per cent in relation to the annual reports and 95 per cent for *The Sunday Times* study. Initial training of two coders by the authors facilitated the high levels of reliability. Where differences were found further scrutiny of either the annual reports or the newspapers was undertaken.

In order to test *H2*, a questionnaire was designed and sent to all current Premier League clubs as of season 2002-2003. Replies were received from 14 clubs (70 per cent response rate). The clubs were asked what activities they undertook, the reasons for their community involvement, whether or not the community activity should be reported and where it was reported.

Results and discussion

Hypothesis 1

This hypothesis examined the extent to which adverse coverage in *The Sunday Times* of football clubs changed over time. The results are displayed in Table I. Although, some positive sentences were reported, it is clear that the net effect is negative. In particular, the number of negative sentences has increased substantially over time by approximately 100 per cent.

Adverse media coverage addressed players involved in violence on the field and a range of off-field issues such as alcohol- and drug-related incidents, excessive wage demands, sex scandals, overpricing of tickets and merchandising, inappropriate comments made by directors and finally, hooliganism and racism.

Although, football hooliganism has apparently experienced a long-term decline since the late-1980s (Chester, 2001, SNCCFR) evidence suggests that hooliganism associated with football is now organised before and after games (Chester, 2001) and in fact, it appears that hooliganism has increased (Pearson, 1998). The reasoning behind the increased level of media coverage is that paper circulations are boosted as stories have higher impact (O'Higgins and Pearson, 2001). The situation is perhaps exacerbated by the media as they have been accused of inciting hooliganism through the use of inflammatory headlines (O'Higgins and Pearson, 2001). All this suggests that clubs and players face increased demands to legitimise their activities and report more positive engagement with community activities.

Hypothesis 2

The validity of the annual report as a reporting mechanism by football clubs in relation to voluntary community disclosure was tested as part of the survey questionnaire. Clubs were asked whether and where they reported their community activities. All clubs agreed that such activities should be reported. The most frequently used reporting media were the match day programme and the annual report followed by the club's web site, local press and finally, local radio and television. The authors found that clubs demonstrated their engagement with the community. For example, all clubs participated in school visits, worked with disabled people and were involved with anti-racism activities. About 93 per cent of respondents engaged in working with disadvantaged people, ethnic integration, helping young offenders and supporting charity events and offering IT facilities. All clubs agreed that their community activities need to be reported and the two most appropriate disclosure vehicles were the match day programme and the annual report. These were ranked ahead of the club web site, local newspapers and radio/TV.

Year	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Adverse comment	396	456	583	985	577	741	760	778	767	784
Positive comment	11	18	30	25	37	22	29	15	25	34

Table I.
Football: adverse and positive sentences in *The Sunday Times* 1992-2001

This affirms this study's decision to use the annual report and confirms *H2* that the annual report is used by clubs to inform stakeholders about club community activities.

Hypothesis 3

Regarding the final hypothesis (*H3*), the authors found that over the ten clubs community disclosure ranged from 11 sentences in 1994 to 153.5 sentences in 2002. This is shown in Table II.

The increased disclosure is consistent with clubs becoming more involved with their communities as a response to adverse media publicity elsewhere. To test this, a correlation with a one year time lag between media reporting and community disclosure was performed. This resulted in 87.4 per cent correlation. The general increase by clubs in their community efforts is evidenced by a report by the football in the community scheme (McGuire and Fenoglio, 2004, p. 2) which stated that:

[...] the general trend (1994 to 2004) seemed to be one of improved relationships between the clubs and the schemes. Many senior officers felt that club officials were now more aware of community relations generally and knew the positive effects that a good, vibrant scheme can have on a club's image.

Image management via community activities can thus be utilised by clubs as a response to, or distraction from, adverse publicity that would otherwise be harmful to the clubs reputations. Recognition of the increase in community activities and the increased level of reporting is also clearly shown at an individual club level exemplified by Chelsea (2000, p. 4):

[...] the Chelsea Football in the Community Scheme was formed as a one man operation in October 1992. Today it has 6 full time officers [...] and in the year 2000 over 13,000 children will have benefited from this Chelsea Community Initiative.

There had been no earlier reporting of this by Chelsea prior to 2000. Some clubs were more explicit in their reporting by recognising the impact and benefits of their community involvement, partly to further their own commercial interests. For instance, Tottenham Hotspur (2002, p. 11):

If we are successful in our planning application, once the new facility at Abridge is in use, the current Spurs Lodge training ground will become the home for our successful Football in the Community scheme.

Further to this:

[...] when Liverpool FC recently announced their new stadium plans, they took the opportunity to re-assess many aspects of the club and are delighted at how they have forged stronger links with the local community as a result (*Football in the Community* magazine, Summer 2003, p. 8).

Such examples show the use of community involvement as a means of partly justifying, and diverting attention away from, continued facility expansion.

Table II.
Community disclosure by
Premier League football
clubs (sample)

Year	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002
Sentences	11	14.5	25.5	76	153.5
Percentage increase	N/A	31.8	75.9	198.0	102.0

Other clubs were concerned with demonstrating their involvement within society and by doing so paying society back. This raises the question as to what they need to pay back, if there were no legitimacy concerns, and hence their desire to re-emphasise their community links. At a club level this is shown by extracts from Liverpool (2000, p. 13) "partnership initiatives (such as Reduc@te) aim to give something back to our local communities" and Manchester United (2000, p. 6):

Manchester United is committed to working on programmes which are able to make a real impact on the community. We also recognise that we have an obligation to play a positive role in our local community.

Across the sample of Premier League clubs, the greatest increases were from 25.5 sentences in 1998 to 76 sentences in 2000 and from that figure to 153.5 in 2002. A total of 55 per cent of all disclosures were made in the last year (2002). Disclosure did not really become significant until 1998. Typically, clubs showed fairly dramatic increases in disclosure in 2000 or 2002 from a low base. For instance, Arsenal and Aston Villa, 28 and 18.5 sentences, respectively, in 2002 (both very little in preceding years). This is borne out by the level of new schemes entered into by Arsenal and its 2002 reporting (p. 12). Firstly, "Arsenal Double Club: Established in 1998 the Arsenal Double Club is an education and football programme which offers literacy, numeracy, IT and football coaching." Secondly, "Arsenal Sport and Learning Project: In September 2001, Arsenal together with Islington Council, launched an exciting and innovative project for year 10 students from Islington schools." Finally, "Gunners in Islington: In April 2000 Arsenal in the Community joined up with local residents, the Metropolitan police and other community organisations to establish the 'Gunners in Canonbury' scheme."

This paper has established that clubs engage in community activities and that they have a need to report those activities. The authors' survey of the clubs found that the most prominent reason stated for community involvement was to "pay back the community" thus explicitly acknowledging their relationship with the community and the need to demonstrate accountability. The reporting of these activities has been utilised to deflect media attention which is consistent with Lindblom's third strategy.

Conclusion, limitations and further work

Football clubs have begun to face questions about their legitimacy. Concerns about the recent commercialisation of the game, player wages and player behaviour, questions about the environmental impact of stadia, academy and associated developments, hooliganism and racial abuse at grounds and their environs, have meant that there are significant questions about the legitimacy of football clubs and their position in society. Using a theoretical framework constructed on media agenda, setting and legitimacy theory, this paper has shown a matched increase in social disclosure by football clubs following an increase in adverse media coverage concerning the football sector, and the Premier League in particular. The threat to legitimacy is sector wide and relates to issues such as excessive player wages, payments to agents, fan behaviour and merchandising. This sector wide response to a potential legitimacy threat is consistent with earlier disclosure studies in other industries, for instance Brown and Deegan (1998) and Deegan *et al.* (2000).

The study of social reporting by football clubs is in its infancy but this study has shown that football clubs have begun to take disclosure seriously and that some of the

larger clubs make significant amounts of social disclosure. Whilst, the study has shown that all clubs have increased community disclosure, there is still a disparity over the individual level of such disclosure. Further research should investigate why some clubs disclose more than others. It remains to be seen whether in time all clubs will follow the lead made by some of the clubs referred to in this study.

The authors acknowledge that there are some limitations in a study which utilises annual reports and counts sentences. Unerman (2000) concluded his methodological study into content analysis by explaining that annual reports do not provide a complete picture of social disclosure. The authors feel that the permanent record of annual reports justifies their use particularly as web sites are often overwritten. He further articulated that sentence counting which ignores "pictures, graphics and different typeface sizes" (p. 678) is likely to result in an incomplete picture of social reporting. However, the authors believe that the increased reliability which sentence counting offers avoids the subjectivity which including these other features would invariably involve. The authors accept that sentences can comprise a number of parts and some details are inevitably lost by ignoring statements that were smaller than a half of a sentence, on balance the authors feel that to include them would be over-resolving the data set.

The authors acknowledge that this is an initial study into social reporting in a particular sector. It has provided valuable insights into social disclosure by Premier League football clubs and provides a useful platform for further work that could involve looking at such disclosures made by all professional football clubs in the English leagues, as well as a cross country comparison.

References

- Ahmed, K. and Courtis, J.K. (1999), "Associations between corporate characteristics and disclosure levels in annual reports: a meta-analysis", *British Accounting Review*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 35-61.
- Boyatzis, R.E. (1998), *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development*, Sage, London.
- Brown, N. and Deegan, C. (1998), "The public disclosure of environmental performance information – a dual test of media agenda setting theory and legitimacy theory", *Accounting & Business Research*, Vol. 29 No. 1, pp. 21-41.
- Campbell, D., Craven, B. and Shrives, P.J. (2003), "Voluntary social reporting in three FTSE sectors: a comment on perception and legitimacy", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 16 No. 4, pp. 558-81.
- Chester, N. (2001), *Fact Sheet 1: Football and Football Hooliganism*, The Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research. University of Leicester Press, Leicester.
- Cross, T.A. and Djajadikerta, H. (2004), "An examination of the quality of voluntary environmental disclosures in New Zealand and Australia: a research framework", paper presented at the 17th International Congress on Social and Environmental Accounting Research, St Andrews, 5-7 September.
- Deegan, C. (2002), "The legitimising effect of social and environmental disclosures – a theoretical foundation", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 282-311.
- Deegan, C. and Gordon, B. (1996), "A study of the environmental disclosure policies of Australian corporations", *Accounting & Business Research*, Vol. 26 No. 3, pp. 187-99.
- Deegan, C. and Unerman, J. (2006), *Financial Accounting Theory*, McGraw-Hill, London.

- Deegan, C., Rankin, M. and Tobin, J. (2002), "An examination of the corporate social and environmental disclosures of BHP from 1983-1997: a test of legitimacy theory", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 312-43.
- Deegan, C., Rankin, M. and Voght, P. (2000), "Firms disclosure reactions to major social incidents: Australian evidence", *Accounting Forum*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 101-30.
- Deloitte and Touche (2000-2005), *Annual Review of Football Finance*, Deloitte and Touche, Manchester.
- Football Task Force (1999), "Investing in the community", submitted to the Minister for Sport 11 January.
- Hamil, S., Michie, J., Oughton, C. and Warby, S. (2000), "Football finances too much money", in Hamil, S., Michie, J., Oughton, C. and Warby, S. (Eds), *Football in the Digital Age, Whose Game is it Anyway?*, Mainstream, Edinburgh.
- Ivankovic, M. (2004), *Content Analysis of Daily Newspaper from the Front Page*, University of Twente Press, Enschede.
- Krippendorff, K. (2004), *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology*, Sage, London.
- Lee, S. (2001), "Grey shirts to grey suits: the political economy of English football in the 1990's", in Brown, A. (Ed.), *Fanatics! Power, Identity and Fandom in Football*, Routledge, London.
- Lindblom, C.K. (1994), "The implications of organizational legitimacy for corporate social performance and disclosure", paper presented at Critical Perspectives on Accounting Conference, New York, NY.
- McGuire, B. and Fenoglio, R. (2004), *Football in the Community, Resources and Opportunity, A National Research Project*, Manchester Metropolitan University Press, Manchester.
- Milne, M.J. and Adler, R.W. (1999), "Exploring the reliability of social and environmental disclosures content analysis", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 12 No. 2, pp. 237-56.
- Milne, M.J. and Patten, D.M. (2002), "Securing organizational legitimacy: an experimental decision case examining the impact of environmental disclosures", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 372-405.
- Morrow, S. (1999), *The New Business of Football*, Macmillan Business.
- Morrow, S. (2000), "Football clubs on the stock exchange: an inappropriate match? The case of Celtic PLC", *The Irish Accounting Review*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 61-90.
- Morrow, S. (2005), *The Business of Football: Image Management in Narrative Communication*, The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland, Edinburgh.
- O'Donovan, G. (1999), "Managing legitimacy through increased corporate environmental reporting: an exploratory study", *Interdisciplinary Environmental Review*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 63-99.
- O'Higgins, P. and Pearson, G. (2001), *Football Hooliganism Fact Sheet*, Football Industry Group. University of Liverpool Press, Liverpool, April.
- Patten, D.M. (1991), "Exposure, legitimacy and social disclosure", *Journal of Accounting & Public Policy*, Vol. 10, pp. 297-308.
- Patten, D.M. (1992), "Intra industry environmental disclosure in response to the Alaskan oil spill: a note on legitimacy theory", *Accounting, Organisations and Society*, Vol. 17, pp. 471-5.
- Pearson, G. (1998), "The English disease? The social-legal construction of the football hooliganism, youth policy", *The Journal of Critical Analysis*, Vol. 6, pp. 1-15.

- Shocker, A.D. and Sethi, S.P. (1974), "An approach to incorporating social preferences in developing corporate action strategies", in Sethi, S.P. (Ed.), *The Unstable Ground: Corporate Social Policy in a Dynamic Society*, Wiley, Melville, CA.
- Suchman, M.C. (1995), "Managing legitimacy: strategic and institutional approaches", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 571-610.
- Unerman, J. (2000), "Methodological issues: reflections on quantification in corporate social reporting content analysis", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 13 No. 5, pp. 667-80.

Corresponding author

Richard Slack can be contacted at: Richard.slack@unn.ac.uk